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Title	The Importance of Customer Support in Achieving Higher Customer Satisfaction in a Business-to-Business Relationship, Case: Veho Group Oy Ab		
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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out, what elements make Mercedes-Benz passenger car division's customer support services more competitive compared to other automobile importers. The research problem in this study was: What kinds of wholesale customer support services are considered effective in business-to-business relationships in order to achieve higher customer satisfaction on retail levels? The research problem was further divided into sub-questions: 1) What are typical elements of business-to-business marketing in a relationship between an importer and the dealers? 2) What elements in customer support create value for dealers in a business-to-business relationship in a relationship between an importer and its dealers? 3) What are the prerequisites for achieving higher dealer satisfaction? The study was made as an assignment for Veho Group Oy Ab that operates in the automobile business. The aim was to study the customer support activities of Mercedes-Benz passenger car division in the field of sales and marketing of new cars. The operational task of the study was to serve as a supportive marketing study material for Mercedes-Benz passenger car division at Veho Group Oy Ab.

The theoretical frame of reference of the study was built on business relationships, customer support, and customer satisfaction. The characteristics of business relationships were discussed by reviewing the most commonly utilized theories and models concerning business market orientation, relationship management as well as the interaction approach. Customer support and customer satisfaction were also approached from a business-to-business perspective. The orientation in business marketing has shifted from transactional marketing to a relationship marketing approach where the customers are seen as resources with which companies create solutions that fulfill the needs of both parties. The most commonly used customer support activities in business markets include such as advertising and promotional support, training of personnel, logistical support, providing samples, etc. Customer support is becoming an important source for competitive advantage. The customer determines competitive advantage and the level of satisfaction in a relationship.

In the empirical part of the study, the aim was to find out how the case company has succeeded in its customer support activities for Mercedes-Benz passenger cars. The author's focus was on Mercedes-Benz passenger car division's dealerships. The approach was qualitative and the data was collected through conducting eight semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data was analyzed by transcribing and coding the recorded interviews. The analysis is based on the various answers of the respondents and the results are presented in a comprehensive way.

The results of the study revealed that the respondents' expectations to customer support activities stem from the core product. The brand Mercedes-Benz is clearly a strong asset of the case company and it allows the dealers to raise their expectations concerning the case company's customer support activities. The results revealed that the case company has managed to build good relationships to its dealers. In order to increase the dealers' total satisfaction, the case company has to try to close the gaps between the dealers' expectations and current performance.

Key words	business-to-business markets, customer support, customer satisfaction, relationship marketing, automotive industry
Further information	

